

<sup>1</sup>Plaintiff initially failed to submit a complete in forma pauperis application with his complaint and the Court denied his application and administratively terminated this action. (See Docket Entry No. 4.) Thereafter, Plaintiff submitted a complete in forma pauperis application. (Docket Entry Nos. 5-8.) As such, this Court will re-open the case to review the complaint.

state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. For the reasons set forth below, the Court concludes that the complaint should be dismissed.

## **I. BACKGROUND**

Plaintiff, incarcerated at R.R.J. in Stafford, Virginia at the time of filing, brings this civil rights action, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, against Defendants Harry Johnson, Director; Sergeant Lieber of the Moorestown Police Department; Moorestown Township; and Kevin Aberant, Mayor of Moorestown.<sup>2</sup> The following factual allegations are taken from the complaint, and are accepted for purposes of this screening only. The Court has made no findings as to the veracity of Plaintiff's allegations.

Plaintiff alleges that on or about December 23, 2009, he was arrested by the Moorestown Police Department at the Lord and Taylor Department store. His personal property, including a watch, cell phone, cell phone charger, ladies' handbag, autographed letter from Jackie Kennedy, birth certificate and a school transcript, was confiscated. The property taken was not

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<sup>2</sup>To the extent that Plaintiff intended to assert diversity jurisdiction, he failed to allege the citizenship of any party. American Motorists Ins. Co. v. American Employers' Ins. Co., 600 F.2d 15, 16 (5th Cir. 1979) (a plaintiff, as the party asserting federal jurisdiction, "must specifically allege each party's citizenship, and these allegations must show that the plaintiff and defendant are citizens of different states"); see also Universal Reinsurance Co., Ltd. v. St. Paul Fire & Marine Ins. Co., 224 F.3d 139, 141 (2d Cir. 2000) ("The failure to allege [the party's] citizenship in a particular state is fatal to diversity jurisdiction").

evidence but nonetheless was held by the police. Plaintiff did not know the whereabouts of the property for months. Defendants continue to deny Plaintiff his property.

Plaintiff is seeking injunctive and declaratory relief, as well as monetary damages.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

### **A. Legal Standard**

#### **1. Standards for a Sua Sponte Dismissal**

The Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub.L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321-66 to 1321-77 (April 26, 1996), requires a district court to review a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner is proceeding in forma pauperis or seeks redress against a governmental employee or entity. The Court is required to identify cognizable claims and to sua sponte dismiss any claim that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). This action is subject to sua sponte screening for dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and § 1915A because Plaintiff is proceeding as an indigent and is a prisoner.

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff. See Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007) (following Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)); see also

United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992).

The Supreme Court refined the standard for summary dismissal of a complaint that fails to state a claim in Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 129 S.Ct. 1937, 173 L.Ed.2d 868 (2009). The Court examined Rule 8(a)(2) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure which provides that a complaint must contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." FED.R.CIV.P. 8(a)(2). Citing its opinion in Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007) for the proposition that "[a] pleading that offers 'labels and conclusions' or 'a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do,'" Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1949 (quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555), the Supreme Court held that, to prevent a summary dismissal, a civil complaint must now allege "sufficient factual matter" to show that the claim is facially plausible. This then "allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside, 578 F.3d 203, 210 (3d Cir. 2009)(citing Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1948).

The Supreme Court's ruling in Iqbal emphasizes that a plaintiff must demonstrate that the allegations of his complaint are plausible. See Iqbal, 129 S.Ct. at 1949-50. See also Twombly, 505 U.S. at 555, & n. 3; Warren Gen. Hosp. v. Amgen Inc., 643 F.3d 77, 84 (3d Cir. 2011). "A complaint must do more

than allege the plaintiff's entitlement to relief. A complaint has to 'show' such an entitlement with its facts." Fowler, 578 F.3d at 211 (citing Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 234-35 (3d Cir. 2008)).

## **2. Section 1983 Actions**

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress ....

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. See West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48, 108 S.Ct. 2250, 101 L.Ed.2d 40 (1988); Piecknick v. Pennsylvania, 36 F.3d 1250, 1255-56 (3d Cir. 1994); Malleus v. George, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011).

## **B. Analysis**

Property loss caused by the intentional acts of government officials does not give rise to a procedural due process claim

under § 1983 where a post-deprivation remedy satisfying minimum procedural due process requirements is available under State law. See Parratt v. Taylor, 451 U.S. 527 (1981) (overruled in part on other grounds by Daniels v. Williams, 474 U.S. 327 (1986)); see also Zinermon v. Burch, 494 U.S. 113, 115 (1990); Hudson v. Palmer, 468 U.S. 517 (1984); Holman v. Hilton, 712 F.2d 854, 856 (3d Cir. 1983). The New Jersey Tort Claims Act ("NJTCA"), N.J.S.A. § 59:1-1, et seq., provides a post-deprivation judicial remedy to persons who believe they were deprived of property at the hands of the State or local government. In this case, Plaintiff's recourse after his personal property was confiscated would be a common-law tort action against the defendants under the New Jersey Tort Claims Act, N.J.S.A. §§ 59:1-1, et seq. Plaintiff does not indicate that he attempted to file a claim pursuant to the New Jersey Tort Claims Act.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

For the reasons stated above, the complaint will be dismissed in its entirety for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1). However, because it is conceivable that Plaintiff may be able to supplement his pleading with facts sufficient to overcome the deficiencies noted herein, the Court will grant Plaintiff leave to move to re-open this case and to

file an amended complaint.<sup>3</sup>

s/Renée Marie Bumb  
RENÉE MARIE BUMB  
United States District Judge

Dated: August 16, 2012

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<sup>3</sup> Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed, the original complaint no longer performs any function in the case and "cannot be utilized to cure defects in the amended [complaint], unless the relevant portion is specifically incorporated in the new [complaint]." 6 Wright, Miller & Kane, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1476 (2d ed.1990) (footnotes omitted). An amended complaint may adopt some or all of the allegations in the original complaint, but the identification of the particular allegations to be adopted must be clear and explicit. Id. To avoid confusion, the safer course is to file an amended complaint that is complete in itself. Id.